

Summary

Rising pressure in the housing market means that more people are struggling to find somewhere to live. In recent years, the use of temporary accommodation has increased. The Social Services Act obliges The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Nav) to ensure that persons who have nowhere to sleep or stay the following night receive assistance in finding adequate temporary accommodation suited to the individual service user's needs. The circular to the Social Services Act elaborates on this responsibility and sets out requirements concerning the quality of provision and the obligation to help those living in such arrangement to find permanent housing.

The project "Assistance with temporary accommodation – what promotes good practice in Nav offices?" has examined who needs assistance from Nav in obtaining temporary accommodation, what characterises successful practice in Nav offices with regard to identifying suitable accommodation and enabling a quick transition to permanent housing, and how societal trends, developments in the housing market and municipal welfare policy shape who are in need of temporary accommodation.

The project comprised three modules: a survey of Nav offices, case studies in five different municipalities and Nav-offices, and three regional workshops with Nav employees. An interim report presenting results from the survey (Hansen & Bråthen, 2025) and a working paper describing the five cases included in the project (Hansen & Flåto, 2026) have been published previously. In this final report, we direct attention primarily to how Nav offices work, and to the conditions that may matter for promoting good practice in the housing field.

Who applies for temporary accommodation

Nav offices describe a social broadening of the group requesting assistance with temporary accommodation, in which economic vulnerability more often than before results in acute housing problems. At the same time, most of those requesting assistance have several social or health-related problems, and those who were already disadvantaged in the housing market have become more exposed. This applies in particular to persons with substance use and mental health problems.

The need for assistance varies considerably. Some are economically disadvantaged and in an acute crisis, and are able to establish themselves in their own housing relatively quickly, in certain cases with some guidance and financial support. For others, various circumstances produce a weaker market position and a more extensive need for assistance.

Structural conditions make the path from temporary to permanent housing long for many: discrimination in the private rental market, low ability to pay in a market with rising prices, long waiting times for municipal housing, and limited availability of suitable housing and services within the field of substance use and mental health problems. Among those who have lived longest in temporary accommodation, we find persons who have already been granted municipal housing but are awaiting allocation.

Assistance with temporary accommodation

The work that constitutes help with temporary accommodation is extensive, extending from the initial approach to Nav, through needs assessment, assessment of suitable temporary accommodation and placement, to ongoing follow-up and assistance with the transition to permanent housing. There is no shared protocol or model for this work, and practice varies between offices.

Dedicated staff resources for housing work in Nav offices can contribute to the development of professional expertise, shared guidelines, structures for cooperation, and more targeted follow-up of users over time. In smaller offices, specialised housing functions are less relevant, but clear routines and structures in housing work can produce better follow-up.

Housing guidance and assistance towards permanent housing is a composite function, ranging from individual assistance to users to network-building with landlords.

The temporary accommodation provision

The survey shows that Nav offices make use of a broad range of temporary accommodation. Guesthouses, hotels and campsites are used by many, in addition to municipal provision. Only just more than three in ten have made quality agreements with private or non-profit providers, and approximately the same proportion use private or non-profit provision without such an agreement. "The case study describes temporary accommodation not as a fixed type of housing, but as a service delivered through a wide range of accommodation solutions obtained as the need arises. These solutions vary in ownership, physical standard, staffing and expertise, ranging from accommodation that offers no more than a roof over one's head, to provision with qualified staff and comprehensive follow-up. Provision most often appears fragmented, and municipalities rarely have a coherent range of accommodations for different groups. The quality requirements set out in the circular to the Social Services Act do not always correspond to actual conditions.

Concluding assessment and recommendations

Knowledge about who requests assistance with temporary accommodation from Nav makes clear that this cannot be reduced to a housing question alone. For many, the issue is not only a need for a roof over one's head, but a need for broad social work follow-up to strengthen their ability to manage everyday life. Time pressure and limited capacity can result in inquiries being reduced to a purely housing-related question, and other needs for assistance are not necessarily followed up. Many informants therefore emphasise time and resources as an important precondition for providing good follow-up.

Housing work in Nav is marked by a fundamental challenge. On the one hand, many of those needing assistance have complex problems that require efforts from several actors simultaneously. On the other hand, responsibility within municipalities is organisationally fragmented across different agencies, administrative levels, legislation and case management systems.

Recommendations

- Better framework conditions for Nav's housing work require efforts in housing policy, in the rental market and in the municipal housing sector, and greater attention to what temporary accommodation is intended to be and how it should be administered.
- Cross-sectoral efforts at national level to address housing welfare challenges and prevent homelessness.
- Clarification of Nav's role in the social housing field.
- Consideration should be given to specifying the circular to the Social Services Act more precisely: what temporary accommodation is intended to be, and how this relates to the responsibilities following from the Act's statement of purpose.
- Shared tools as a basis for systematic follow-up of people in temporary accommodation and for aggregated real-time data locally and nationally.
- A clearer description of municipalities' responsibility for maintaining an overview of the need for temporary accommodation, and for having a strategy for providing adequate services.
- Nav should be included in municipal housing needs assessments and should develop systematic procedures for broad reporting on the housing challenges it encounters.
- Strengthening Nav's social work on housing through sufficient social work expertise and resources, so that temporary accommodation is linked to broader follow-up and support towards a stable housing situation.
- Systematic sharing of experience across Nav offices and municipal contexts, so that knowledge about what works does not depend on incidental familiarity between individual offices.

This summary was produced with the assistance of the AI tool Claude (Anthropic). The text has been reviewed and verified against the original report by the project manager and Fafo's communications department.